

[10 June 1948]

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An earnest concern for all of our futures lies behind this meeting. This is not a political meeting in the usual sense of the word, even though it is addressing exclusively political problems.

The immediate occasion for this gathering may be viewed as the strict refusal by our government to agree to the path of direct negotiation proposed by Russia. This incident starkly illuminates how perilous the state of relations between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. is.

All nations are thirsting for peace. The deep wounds inflicted by the war are still unhealed. Nowhere are governments independent of the will of their peoples, not even in a totalitarian-ruled state. Everyone knows that, in the present technical conditions, war means mass destruction to humanity and the products of its labor to an extent never before experienced. How, then, is it possible that once again there is a threat of war? How is it possible that otherwise normal people in this country do not unconditionally recoil from the very idea of a preventive war, although they must know that they are risking irreparable harm to their own country? Why are heavy sacrifices being made for the economic assistance of Western Europe, while the threat of war, which cripples the enterprising spirit, is being increased at the same time, thereby making the relief campaign itself illusory?

The answer is simple. As long as war is not made impossible or at least practically hopeless for the aggressor through supranational organization, governments must take measures to ensure the most favorable situation for themselves in case of war.

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These measures create such tensions and such mistrust, however, that sooner or later they will necessarily lead to the war feared by all.

The effect of this situation is that the USA, like Russia, seeks to make the greatest possible proportion of nations and militarily important positions sufficiently dependent on them to win over reliable allies or, as the case may be, bases in the event of war. Every such step by one of them constitutes at the same time a threat to the other and produces to a certain extent automatic counter-reactions. Each interprets the actions by their counterpart as driven by the intention to rule the whole Earth.

Thus: no peace is possible without a supranational solution to the security problem, making national preparations for war unnecessary and even impossible.

The United States emerged from the war as the strongest military and economic power. For some time to come, it alone will have the powerful atomic weapon at its disposal. Along with this power, however, comes the greatest of responsibilities. We are the ones mainly responsible for choosing the ill-fated path of an arms race since the end of the war, which largely spoiled the then far more auspicious prospects of a uniquely effective supranational solution to the security problem. Each new step in national armament leads us further away from the goal of a secure peace. But each such step is also a nail in the coffin of democratic freedoms.

Before we can seek a solution to this great problem, we must work toward regaining the mutual trust lost during these three fateful years. This can only happen through patient and understanding negotiation; it should and must not be a policy of weakness and unjustified concessions, but a policy of fairness and appreciation of the vital necessities and traditions of other nations.

The policies of a democratic nation depend on the discernment and character of each one of its citizens. We must spare no effort in making sure that the important influence currently wielded by our country is used for the benefit of all nations; this is the only way we can attain lasting security for ourselves and can preserve our political legacy.

s. Einstein on Peace p 486f

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